

Try To Understand Papa

Papa's not too hard to understand,
 he was just a man
With a hawkish face and long steps
Ending in feet that emptied puddles.
Kept his manhood locked inside
His fists so tight, they turned
Ashen black.

Papa's easy to understand,
 if you're a man
Who stands high watching white folks
Slide by the brewery stable where
He kept the horses fine. Standing
His ground as they pranced on the end
Of the lead; standing so tall
He needed a spear.

Papa was an easy man to understand;
 even then --
When he was so gentle they called him boy,
And couldn't see the thin bolt of vein
Corded from shoulder to forearm. I pluck
The wet scent of frying meat and the scent
Of his hands from those mornings
When he helped me wake.

Grandpa was a man who posed
 in a Ford
With his jaw at right angles to the sun;
And even cousins called him Papa
'Cause they could understand
How he held out through a card game
That lost the house. Then won it back
Playing woman against man.

Gossip tells that he paced
 before the doorway
Of a fourposter and counted eight times
Before he got a son, then spent
His manhood away from home.
But I smell the scent of his hands
And purse the lips he gave me.
Papa's not too hard to understand;
He was a man.

-- Colleen J. McElroy

Bellingham, WA